

plays by jez butterworth

Plays by Jez Butterworth have established him as one of the most compelling and innovative playwrights of contemporary theatre. Renowned for his sharp dialogue, layered storytelling, and ability to capture the complexities of human nature, Butterworth's works have garnered critical acclaim and captivated audiences worldwide. His plays often explore themes of identity, power, and societal change, blending dark humor with profound insights. This article provides an in-depth overview of the most significant plays by Jez Butterworth, examining their themes, reception, and impact on modern theatre.

Overview of Jez Butterworth's Career as a Playwright

Jez Butterworth emerged onto the theatre scene in the early 2000s with a reputation for writing thought-provoking and innovative plays. His distinctive voice combines poetic language with gritty realism, resonating with diverse audiences and critics alike. Butterworth's work often delves into British culture, politics, and social dynamics, making his plays both timely and timeless.

Throughout his career, Butterworth has received numerous awards, including the Olivier Award, Tony Award nominations, and critical praise for his ability to craft compelling characters and provocative narratives. His plays are characterized by their atmospheric storytelling and nuanced characterizations, which invite audiences to reflect on contemporary issues through personal stories.

Key Plays by Jez Butterworth

Below is a comprehensive look at some of the most influential plays written by Jez Butterworth, highlighting their themes, significance, and theatrical innovations.

1. Mojo (1995)

Although written early in Butterworth's career, *Mojo* remains one of his most celebrated works.

- **Synopsis:** A dark comedy set in 1950s Soho, London, revolving around a jazz club owner embroiled in organized crime and gangsters.
- **Themes:** Crime, loyalty, ambition, and the allure of the entertainment world.

- **Significance:** Known for its sharp wit and vivid characters, *Mojo* established Butterworth's reputation as a playwright capable of blending humor with gritty realism.

2. The Night Heron (2002)

A lesser-known but critically appreciated piece that showcases Butterworth's poetic language.

- **Synopsis:** An atmospheric monologue about a man's obsession with a mysterious woman, exploring themes of love and obsession.
- **Themes:** Obsession, longing, and the passage of time.
- **Significance:** Demonstrates Butterworth's flair for lyrical dialogue and introspective storytelling.

3. The Ferryman (2017)

Perhaps Butterworth's most acclaimed and celebrated play, *The Ferryman* has become a modern theatrical masterpiece.

- **Synopsis:** Set in rural Northern Ireland during The Troubles, the play follows the Carney family as they confront political violence and personal loss.
- **Themes:** Family, political conflict, grief, and reconciliation.
- **Reception:** Won the Olivier Award for Best New Play and the Tony Award for Best Play, confirming its status as a significant work in contemporary theatre.
- **Impact:** Praised for its powerful storytelling, authentic portrayal of Irish life, and masterful blending of political and personal narratives.

4. The River (2012)

A poetic and minimalist piece that explores themes of memory and longing.

- **Synopsis:** A man's silent reflection by a river, contemplating love and

loss, with a focus on mood and atmosphere.

- **Themes:** Memory, grief, and the passage of time.
- **Significance:** Demonstrates Butterworth's ability to evoke emotion through sparse dialogue and naturalistic staging.

5. Jerusalem (2009)

Although written by Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem* was created in collaboration with director Ian Rickson and actor Mark Rylance, and it became a cultural phenomenon.

- **Synopsis:** A sprawling story about Johnny "Rooster" Byron, a rebellious figure living on the fringes of society in rural England.
- **Themes:** Rebellion, rural life, societal change, and the search for identity.
- **Reception:** Awarded the Olivier Award for Best New Play and considered one of the greatest British plays of the 21st century.

Thematic Elements in Jez Butterworth's Plays

Butterworth's works are distinguished by recurring themes that resonate across his different plays. Understanding these themes offers insight into his artistic vision.

1. Identity and Rebellion

Many of Butterworth's characters grapple with their sense of self and societal expectations. Plays like *Jerusalem* depict characters who challenge authority and seek personal freedom.

2. Political and Social Commentary

From *The Ferryman* to *Jerusalem*, Butterworth explores political conflicts and social change, emphasizing how personal lives are intertwined with larger societal issues.

3. Memory and Loss

Themes of longing, grief, and the passage of time are central, especially in plays like *The River* and *The Ferryman*.

4. Atmosphere and Place

Butterworth's plays often evoke strong sense of place, whether it's the gritty streets of Soho or the rural Irish countryside, creating immersive environments that deepen thematic resonance.

Reception and Impact of Jez Butterworth's Plays

Jez Butterworth's plays have not only been critically acclaimed but have also influenced contemporary theatre in meaningful ways.

1. Critical Acclaim

His works have received numerous awards, nominations, and enthusiastic reviews, cementing his reputation as a leading playwright.

2. Cultural Significance

Plays like *The Ferryman* have sparked conversations about political history, societal change, and cultural identity, making Butterworth's work relevant beyond the theatre community.

3. Influence on Theatre Practice

Butterworth's atmospheric staging, naturalistic dialogue, and layered storytelling have inspired directors and playwrights, encouraging a more immersive and emotionally honest approach to contemporary theatre.

Conclusion: The Legacy of Jez Butterworth's Plays

Jez Butterworth's plays continue to resonate with audiences and critics for their authentic portrayals of human struggles, their insightful commentary on society, and their innovative theatrical techniques. From the darkly humorous *Mojo* to the emotionally powerful *The Ferryman* and the culturally significant *Jerusalem*, his body of work exemplifies the best of modern British theatre. As he continues to write and inspire, Jez Butterworth's plays will undoubtedly remain influential and relevant for generations to come.

Whether you are a theatre enthusiast, a student, or a critic, exploring the

plays by Jez Butterworth offers valuable insight into contemporary storytelling, the human condition, and the evolving landscape of theatrical art.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are some of Jez Butterworth's most acclaimed plays?

Some of Jez Butterworth's most acclaimed plays include 'Jerusalem', 'The Ferryman', 'Mojo', and 'The River'.

What themes does Jez Butterworth commonly explore in his plays?

Jez Butterworth often explores themes of rural life, social change, political tension, identity, and human relationships in his works.

Has Jez Butterworth received any major awards for his plays?

Yes, Jez Butterworth has received numerous awards, including the Olivier Award for Best New Play for 'Jerusalem' and the Tony Award nomination for 'The Ferryman'.

Where can I watch or experience Jez Butterworth's plays today?

His plays are frequently staged in London's West End, on Broadway, and in regional theaters worldwide. Some productions are also available through special broadcasts or recordings.

What is the plot of Jez Butterworth's play 'Jerusalem'?

'Jerusalem' centers around Johnny 'Rooster' Byron, a rebellious figure in a small English village, exploring themes of freedom, community, and societal change.

How has Jez Butterworth influenced contemporary theatre?

Jez Butterworth is known for his sharp dialogue, complex characters, and ability to blend humor with serious social commentary, greatly impacting modern British theatre.

Are there any upcoming productions of Jez Butterworth's plays?

Upcoming productions vary by region, so it's best to check local theatre schedules or official announcements for the latest information on Jez Butterworth's plays.

What is the critical reception of Jez Butterworth's recent works?

His recent plays, such as 'The Ferryman', have received critical acclaim for their compelling storytelling, strong performances, and social relevance.

Additional Resources

Jez Butterworth plays have established themselves as a significant force in contemporary theatre, blending sharp wit, profound themes, and compelling character development to create works that resonate deeply with audiences and critics alike. As a playwright, Butterworth has a knack for capturing the nuances of human relationships and societal dynamics, often set against evocative backdrops that enhance the storytelling. His plays are known for their lyrical dialogue, layered narratives, and a keen sense of atmosphere, making them a staple for those seeking thought-provoking and emotionally charged theatre experiences.

Overview of Jez Butterworth's Playwriting Style

Jez Butterworth's writing is distinguished by its lyrical quality and meticulous attention to detail. His plays often explore themes such as identity, power, memory, and societal change, woven seamlessly into engaging plots that keep audiences captivated from start to finish. His dialogue tends to be naturalistic yet poetic, creating authentic characters whose voices linger long after the curtain falls.

Features of his style include:

- Rich, evocative language
- Complex, multi-dimensional characters
- A strong sense of place that enhances narrative depth
- Use of humor to offset darker themes
- Layered storytelling that invites multiple interpretations

Pros:

- Engages audiences emotionally and intellectually
- Offers nuanced commentary on contemporary issues
- Creates memorable, quotable dialogue
- Balances entertainment with serious thematic exploration

Cons:

- Some critics find his plays densely layered, potentially alienating casual viewers
- The intricate dialogue may challenge actors and directors
- Not all plays have universal appeal; some are more niche

Major Plays by Jez Butterworth

Below is an exploration of some of his most influential and celebrated works, highlighting their themes, strengths, and impact.

1. The River (2012)

Overview:

The River is a one-act play that centers on a man and a woman who meet at a secluded riverbank. Their interaction is intimate, tense, and layered with subtext, unraveling themes of desire, betrayal, and the passing of time.

Themes:

- Human connection and alienation
- The fleeting nature of moments and memories
- The tension between vulnerability and concealment

Features:

- Minimalist staging that emphasizes dialogue and performance
- Intimate setting fostering a sense of immediacy
- Open-ended conclusion encouraging interpretation

Strengths:

- Intimate, emotionally resonant performances
- Poignant exploration of human fragility
- Suitable for small theatre productions

Weaknesses:

- Limited scope; primarily a character study
- May feel understated for audiences expecting more action

2. The Ferryman (2017)

Overview:

Set in rural Northern Ireland during the 1980s, The Ferryman is a sprawling family drama that delves into political unrest, personal grief, and family secrets. It became one of the most acclaimed plays of the decade, winning the Olivier Award for Best New Play.

Themes:

- Political conflict and its impact on private lives
- Family loyalty and betrayal
- Grief and reconciliation

Features:

- Large cast with intricate character relationships
- Episodic structure with moments of humor amidst tragedy
- Richly detailed setting that immerses the audience

Pros:

- Deeply layered storytelling with multiple narrative threads
- Powerful performances from a large ensemble cast
- Captures the complexity of socio-political issues through personal stories

Cons:

- Length (over three hours) may challenge audiences
- Requires considerable staging resources due to cast size
- Some viewers might find the political themes heavy or dense

3. Mojo (1995)

Overview:

Mojo is a dark comedy set in 1950s Soho, London, revolving around a jazz club owner entangled in crime and mistaken identities. It's renowned for its sharp wit, fast-paced dialogue, and vivid atmosphere.

Themes:

- Crime and morality
- Ambition and betrayal
- Cultural shifts in post-war Britain

Features:

- Rapid-fire dialogue and comedic timing
- Stylized setting capturing the noir aesthetic
- Use of music and atmosphere to heighten tension

Strengths:

- Engaging and humorous script
- Exciting staging opportunities with a lively cast
- Offers a gritty, authentic glimpse into 1950s London

Weaknesses:

- The dark tone may not appeal to all audiences
- Some may find the pace too frenetic
- Requires strong comedic timing from cast

Critical Reception and Impact

Jez Butterworth's plays have garnered widespread critical acclaim, with *The Ferryman* particularly standing out as a landmark in contemporary theatre. Critics praise his ability to craft intricate characters and weave socio-political themes into compelling narratives. His work often sparks conversations about history, identity, and morality, making his plays both entertaining and intellectually enriching.

Impact Highlights:

- Recognition through awards such as the Olivier, Tony nominations, and more
- Influence on emerging playwrights inspired by his lyrical dialogue and storytelling techniques
- Contributions to the revival of ensemble theatre and large-scale productions

Criticisms:

While generally praised, some critics note that Butterworth's plays can sometimes feel dense or overly long, potentially challenging for less patient audiences. Additionally, his penchant for political themes may not resonate equally with all viewers.

Notable Collaborations and Productions

Butterworth's plays have been performed worldwide, often in collaboration with leading directors and theatre companies. Notable productions include:

- The original run of *The Ferryman* at the Royal Court Theatre and later on Broadway, where it garnered numerous awards.
- Production of *Mojo* at the Royal Court and subsequent West End runs, showcasing his early sharp wit.
- Various revivals of his plays, demonstrating their lasting relevance and appeal.

Conclusion: Why Jez Butterworth's Plays Matter

Jez Butterworth's works stand out for their poetic language, layered storytelling, and profound thematic explorations. His plays challenge audiences to reflect on personal and societal issues through compelling narratives and memorable characters. Whether you're a seasoned theatre-goer or new to contemporary drama, Butterworth's plays offer a rich tapestry of human experience that continues to influence and inspire the theatrical world.

Final thoughts:

- His plays are best appreciated with attentive viewing, as their depth and nuance often reveal themselves upon reflection.
- They are particularly suited for productions that can handle their scale and complexity.
- For audiences seeking theatre that combines lyrical beauty with meaningful themes, Jez Butterworth's plays are an essential addition to the modern repertoire.

In summary, Jez Butterworth has cemented his reputation as one of the most talented and influential playwrights of his generation. His ability to blend poetic language with compelling storytelling ensures that his plays will remain relevant and celebrated for years to come.

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plays by jez butterworth: *Jez Butterworth Plays: Two* JEZ. BUTTERWORTH, 2019-07-11 'Come, you drunken spirits. Come, you battalions. You fields of ghosts who walk these green plains still. Come, you giants!' When Jez Butterworth's Jerusalem premiered at the Royal Court Theatre, London, in 2009, it served notice of an astonishing development in the career of a writer whose debut, *Mojo*, had premiered on the same stage nearly fifteen years before. Unearthing the mythic roots of contemporary English life, and featuring Mark Rylance in an indelible central performance as Johnny 'Rooster' Byron, the play transferred to the West End and then to Broadway, before returning to the West End in 2011. 'Storming... restores one's faith in the power of theatre' Independent. 'Unarguably one of the best dramas of the twenty-first century' Guardian. Jerusalem was followed by the bewitching chamber play *The River* (Royal Court, 2012), a 'magnetically eerie, luminously beautiful psychodrama' Time Out. 'A delicately unfolding puzzle... all of it is wrapped in marvellous language... extraordinary' The Times. This volume concludes with the multi-award-winning *The Ferryman* (Royal Court and West End, 2017; Broadway, 2018), an excavation of lives shattered by violence, set in a farmhouse in Northern Ireland in 1981. 'A richly absorbing and emotionally abundant play... an instant classic' Independent. 'A magnificent play that uses, brilliantly, the vitality of live theatre to express the deadly legacy of violence' Financial Times. Also included here is the screenplay for the short film *The Clear Road Ahead* (2011), published here for the first time, and an edited transcript of a conversation between Butterworth and the playwright Simon Stephens.

plays by jez butterworth: *Mojo* Jez Butterworth, 1999 THE STORY: Silver Johnny is the new singing sensation, straight out of a low-life Soho clubland bar in 1958. His success could be the big break for two dead-end workers in the bar, if they play their cards right and trust the owner of the place to

plays by jez butterworth: *Jerusalem* Jez Butterworth, 2011 Winner of Best Play, 2009 Evening Standard Awards, Best New Play, Critics Circle Awards, and Best New Play, Whatsonstage.com Awards.

plays by jez butterworth: *Class, Culture and Tragedy in the Plays of Jez Butterworth* Sean McEvoy, 2020-12-29 Jez Butterworth is undoubtedly one of the most popular and commercially successful playwrights to have emerged in Britain in the early twenty-first century. This book, only the second so far to have been written on him, argues that the power of his most acclaimed work comes from a reinvigoration of traditional forms of tragedy expressed in a theatricalized

working-class language. Butterworth's most developed tragedies invoke myth and legend as a figurative resistance to the flat and crushing instrumentalism of contemporary British political and economic culture. In doing so they summon older, resonant narratives which are both popular and high-cultural in order to address present cultural crises in a language and in a form which possess wide appeal. Tracing the development of Butterworth's work chronologically from *Mojo* (1995) to *The Ferryman* (2017), each chapter offers detailed critical readings of a single play, exploring how myth and legend become significant in a variety of ways to Butterworth's presentation of cultural and personal crisis.

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plays by jez butterworth: *Parlour Song* Jez Butterworth, 2009 A blackly hilarious exploration of deceit, paranoia and murderous desire, as the spirit of the Blues lands in leafy suburbia. Demolition expert Ned lives in a nice new house on a nice new estate on the edge of the English countryside. He loves his job. Barbecues. Car-boot sales. Fitness programmes. Outwardly his life is entirely unremarkable. Not unlike his friend and neighbour Dale. So why has he not slept a wink in six months? Why is he so terrified of his attractive wife Joy? And why is it every time he leaves on business, something else goes missing from his home? Jez Butterworth's play *Parlour Song* was first performed at the Atlantic Theater, New York, in February 2008, before receiving its European premiere at the Almeida Theatre, London, in March 2009.

plays by jez butterworth: *Plays* Jez Butterworth, 2011 Four full-length plays and two previously unpublished shorts from the multi-award-winning author of *Jerusalem*. Jez Butterworth burst onto the theatre scene aged twenty-five with *Mojo*, 'one of the most dazzling Royal Court main stage debuts in years' (*Time Out*). This first volume of his *Collected Plays* contains that play plus the three that followed, as well as two short one-person pieces published here for the first time - everything in fact that precedes *Jerusalem*, 'unarguably one of the best dramas of the twenty-first century' (*Guardian*). *Plays One* includes: *Mojo* *The Night Heron* *The Winterling* *Leavings* (previously unpublished) *Parlour Song* *The Naked Eye* (previously unpublished) Introducing the plays is an interview with Jez Butterworth specially conducted for this volume.

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plays by jez butterworth: *The 101 Greatest Plays* Michael Billington, 2015-09-01 Having surveyed post-war British drama in *State of the Nation*, Michael Billington now looks at the global picture. In this provocative and challenging new book, he offers his highly personal selection of the 100 greatest plays ranging from the Greeks to the present-day. But his book is no mere list. Billington justifies his choices in extended essays- and even occasional dialogues- that put the plays in context, explain their significance and trace their performance history. In the end, it's a book that poses an infinite number of questions. What makes a great play? Does the definition change with time and circumstance? Or are certain common factors visible down the ages? It's safe to say that it's a book that, in revising the accepted canon, is bound to stimulate passionate argument and debate. Everyone will have strong views on Billington's chosen hundred and will be inspired to make their own selections. But, coming from Britain's longest-serving theatre critic, these essays are the product of a lifetime spent watching and reading plays and record the adventures of a soul amongst masterpieces.

plays by jez butterworth: *The Theatre and Films of Jez Butterworth* David Ian Rabey, 2015-02-26 Jez Butterworth is the most critically acclaimed and commercially successful new British dramatist of the 21st century: his acclaimed play *Jerusalem* has had extended runs in the West End and on Broadway. This book is the first to examine Butterworth's writings for stage and film and to identify how and why his work appeals so widely and profoundly. It examines the way that he weaves suspenseful stories of eccentric outsiders, whose adventures echo widespread contemporary social anxieties, and involve surprising expressions of both violence and generosity. This book reveals how Butterworth unearths the strange forms of wildness and defiance lurking in the depths and at the

edges of England: where unpredictable outbursts of humour highlight the intensity of life, and characters discover links between their haunting past and the uncertainties of the present, to create a meaningful future. Supplemented by essays from James D. Balestrieri and Elisabeth Angel-Perez, this is a clear and detailed source of reference for a new generation of theatre audiences, practitioners and directors who wish to explore the work of this seminal dramatist.

plays by jez butterworth: *Play the Scene* Michael Schulman, Eva Mekler, 2004-12-07 A collection of over a hundred scenes and monologues from plays from the Elizabethan period to contemporary Tony Award winners.

plays by jez butterworth: *The Hills of California* Jez Butterworth, 2025-04-24 'This house. It's called Sea View. It's just I've looked out of every window, and you can't. You can't see the sea.' Blackpool, 1976. The driest summer in two hundred years. The beaches are packed. The hotels are heaving. In the sweltering backstreets, far from the choc ices and donkey rides, the Webb Sisters are returning to their mother's run-down guest house, as she lies dying upstairs. When memories from their youth come flooding back, the sisters must confront their past and untangle a web of secrets, betrayals and profound emotional bonds. Jez Butterworth's play *The Hills of California* was first performed at the Harold Pinter Theatre in London's West End in 2024, directed by Sam Mendes, and produced by Sonia Friedman Productions and Neal Street. This edition features the revised and definitive version of the play performed during its acclaimed Broadway transfer later that year.

plays by jez butterworth: *100 Plays to Save the World* Elizabeth Freestone, Jeanie O'Hare, 2023-11-07 This book is a guide to one hundred plays addressing the most urgent and important issue of our time: the climate crisis *100 Plays to Save the World* is a book to provoke as well as inspire—to start conversations, inform debate, challenge our thinking, and be a launchpad for future productions. Above all, it is a call to arms—to step up, think big, and unleash theatre's power to imagine a better future into being. Each play is explored with an essay illuminating key themes in climate issues: Resources, Energy, Migration, Responsibility, Fightback, and Hope. *100 Plays to Save the World* is an empowering resource for theatre directors, producers, teachers, youth leaders, and writers looking for plays that speak to our present moment.

plays by jez butterworth: *Contemporary English Plays* James Graham, DC Moore, Anders Lustgarten, Alia Bano, Rachel De-lahay, 2015-02-26 Edited and introduced by leading cultural and theatre critic Aleks Sierz, this bold and urgent collection of contemporary plays by England's newest and most relevant young writers explores the various cultures and identities of a nation that is at once traditional, nationalistic and multicultural. *Eden's Empire*, by James Graham is an uncompromising political thriller exploring the events of the Suez Crisis, and the tragic story of its flawed hero – Churchill's golden boy and heir apparent, Anthony Eden. *Alaska*, by D. C. Moore features Frank, an ordinary bloke who likes smoking, history and playing *House of the Dead 3*. He can put up with his job on a cinema kiosk until a new supervisor arrives who is younger than him. *And Asian*. *A Day at the Racists*, by Anders Lustgarten is a timely examination of the rise of the BNP which attempts to understand why people might be drawn to the BNP and diagnoses the deeper cause of that attraction. *Shades*, by Alia Bano shows Sabrina, a single girl-about-town, who is seeking Mr Right in a world where traditional and liberal values sit side-by-side, but rarely see eye-to-eye. *The Westbridge*, by Rachel De-lahay begins with the accusation of a black teenager which sparks riots on South London streets. Among it all, a couple from very different backgrounds navigate the minefield between them and their disparate but coexisting neighbourhood.

plays by jez butterworth: *The Oxford Dictionary of Plays* Michael Patterson, 2015-01-29 *The Oxford Dictionary of Plays* provides essential information on the best-known, best-loved, and most important plays in world theatre. Each entry includes details of the title, author, date of writing, date of first performance, genre, setting, and composition of cast; there is also a summary of the play's plot, and a brief commentary. Genres covered include: burlesque, comedy, farce, historical drama, kabuki, masque, melodrama, morality play, mystery play, No, romantic comedy, tragicomedy, satire, and tragedy. The perfect guide for students and scholars of drama and literature, theatre

professionals, and directors looking for plays for performance.

plays by jez butterworth: The Big House Anthology: Diverse Plays for Diverse Casts

David Watson, Andy Day, James Meteyard, 2023-05-18 The Big House Anthology is a celebration of the last decade of work and plays by a unique theatre company, featuring five original plays that offer a chance for stories with diverse casts to contribute to the canon of theatre's literature. As a UK-based theatre company, The Big House empowers care leavers and other disadvantaged young people through performance and long-term support. Their plays are born from the hearts and minds of the young people they engage, with this anthology offering five very different plays: a runner struck down by MS; a rapper who spits and snarls and tries to find it in herself to forgive; a teenager who fights for wealth, status and respect in the underworld of county lines; a cackling cowboy they call Corona; and a dog that has been tracked, murdered and stuck in a stew. This anthology celebrates the explosive creativity that comes from mobilising and platforming diverse voices, and its importance in generating social change. Framed and introduced by directors and writers discussing their practice, along with an introduction by Jez Butterworth, this is a book for students, educators, artists, theatre-practitioners, social workers and storytellers to tell stories that are rarely told, let alone with such fierce authenticity.

plays by jez butterworth: The English Crime Play in the Twentieth Century Beatrix Hesse,

2015-08-02 This is the first comprehensive study of the English crime play, presenting a survey of 250 plays performed in the London West End between 1900 and 2000. The first part is historically orientated while the second one establishes a tentative poetics of the genre. The third part presents an analysis of some 20 plays adapted from detective fiction.

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The sighting of a rare bird attracts attention to a remote part of the Fens. The visiting birdwatchers cannot know what dangers lie in the freezing darkness of the marshes. In an isolated cabin, Wattmore, bruised and bleeding, is recording the Old Testament onto cassette. Griffin arrives with two bags of chips. Salvation is at hand—a cash prize for winning the university poetry competition and the arrival of a possible lodger.

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